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AF

Wasteful driving cost DMV thousands, state audit finds

BY WILL DORAN
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RALEIGH

Over the last three years, high-ranking DMV employees wasted nearly $100,000 of taxpayer money, according to a new report that found hundreds of unauthorized trips in state vehicles.

One midlevel supervisor told the Office of the State Auditor that at least some of the wasteful spending was because of a "paramilitary" culture the leadership fostered, in which superiors' decisions could not be questioned.

The audit identified two separate issues, both involving improper use of state-owned vehicles.

One regional DMV manager never paid back more than $5,600 she owed the state, the audit found. But the main focus of the audit was a former deputy commissioner who oversaw the DMV's law enforcement arm, the License and Theft Bureau. The audit said his orders to an inspector violated office policy and led to $85,000 in waste.

While it's unclear if the state will get any of the money back, state officials did tell the auditor's office they've started putting GPS trackers in cars that employees take home.

"As a result of this audit, we are working to strengthen our policies and procedures to ensure this does not happen again," said a written statement from the DMV.

The auditor's office didn't name any of the employees involved, but the Department of Transportation confirmed that Randy Dishong was the deputy commissioner named in the report. Dishong couldn't be reached Wednesday.

Between 2014 and 2016, Dishong reported to Kelly Thomas, who led the DMV under former Republican Gov. Pat McCrory. The DMV is a part of DOT, which was led by Tony Tata during most of that time. All three men are veterans.

Before entering state government when McCrory took office, Dishong and Tata worked together at Wake County schools. According to Dishong's LinkedIn page, he had several jobs leading security, emergency response and transportation for the school district while Tata was the superintendent there.

The audit found that the inspector, who wasn't identified, was first tapped by Thomas and Dishong to "reform" the DMV, the audit said, although it's

SEE AUDIT, 10A

BUSINESS

N&O sells longtime Raleigh offices

BY CRAIG JARVIS
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RALEIGH

The News & Observer has reached an agreement to sell its downtown Raleigh office building for $22 million to a California-based investment firm.

The deal, signed Thursday with Acquisition Group, will move the media company out of its longtime home on South McDowell Street, but will keep it downtown in a highrise on Fayetteville Street.

The 3-acre N&O property will be developed into a mixed-use complex that could include stores, offices, housing and a hotel, said Sam Sotoodeh, president of the California-based investment company. The site currently includes two buildings and a parking deck.

Sotoodeh said Acquisition has had its sights on The N&O property for 30 years. He said he has offered to buy the building a number of times, but it never worked out for one reason or another.

"We believe in Raleigh," he said. "We think there are many opportunities. This is a city that has all the right elements to grow and do well."

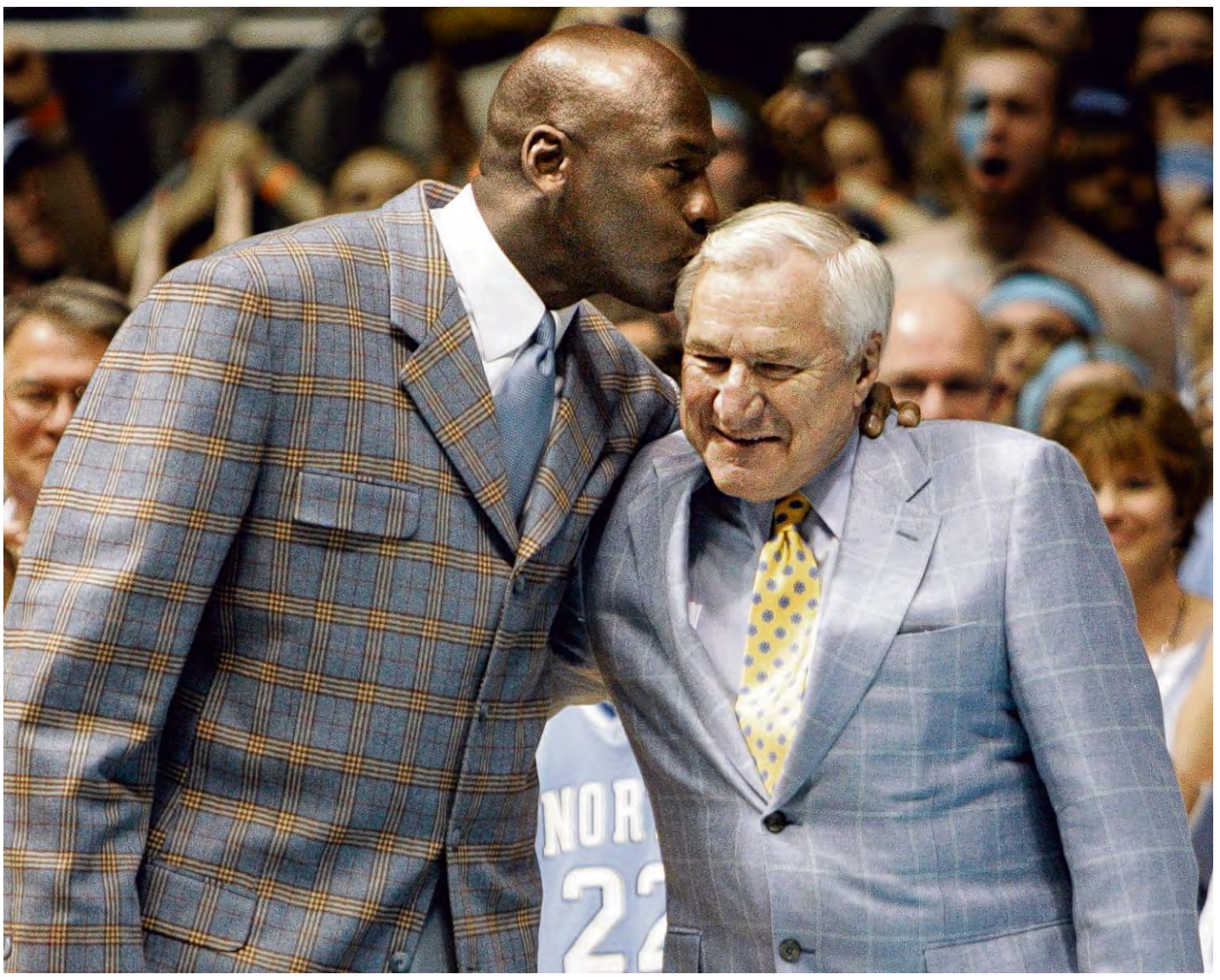
Sotoodeh described himself and his partners as "patient investors" who will work closely with city officials and residents to come up with a project that will benefit everyone.

The N&O will move about four blocks to the 17-story One City Plaza once renovations there are completed, which is anticipated to be in late March or early April.

The agreement was reached after a previous deal to sell the N&O property – announced in late 2015 as a $20.2 million sale to local investors – ended in disappointment for all parties in January 2017. Discussions with Acquisition Group began soon after, said N&O President and Publisher Sara Glines, who came to The News & Observer in Sep-

SEE SALE, 2A

UNC library collection preserves thousands of Dean Smith papers



AP file photo

Former North Carolina player Michael Jordan, left, gives his former coach Dean Smith a kiss during halftime at a February 2007 game in Chapel Hill. Among the items in UNC's Smith collection is a congratulatory telegram from "Michael," presumably Jordan.

BY JANE STANCILL
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CHAPEL HILL

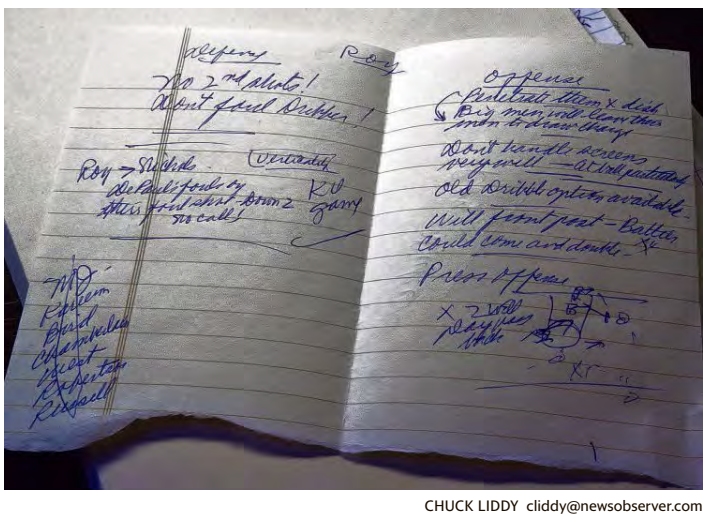
The personal papers of Dean Smith have been donated to UNC-Chapel Hill's Wilson Library, where fans will be able to peruse handwritten notes and gain new insights into the famous basketball coach.

The university announced the gift Thursday. The collection includes 12,000 items that belonged to the late UNC coach, who died in 2015 at the age of 83.

Visitors to the library will be able to see scrapbooks made by Smith's parents, marking milestones in his early career. There's a telegram from "Michael," presumably Michael Jordan, congratulating Smith on 877 wins, when he surpassed the record of University of Kentucky coach Adolph Rupp. And there's a scrap of notebook paper, circa 2000, for then-Kansas coach Roy Williams, with scribbled tips and a diagram on how to beat Duke: "Don't handle screens very well....Press offense."

Despite the intense competition, there was apparently no animosity between Smith and Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski, who would eventually pass Smith as winningest men's

SEE SMITH, 7A



CHUCK LIDDY cliddy@newsobserver.com

A handwritten note to UNC head coach Roy Williams from Dean Smith is part of the over 12,000 personal Smith records that will be available for research at UNC-Chapel Hill's Wilson Library.

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